

apuntes

Reflexiones teológicas desde el contexto Hispano-Latino

**Evaluation of Hispanic Growth in Mainline
Protestant Denominations**

Rev. Dr. Luis C. Bernard

Revisiting Law and Gospel

Rev. Dr. George Cruz-Martinez

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Apuntes

Theological Reflections from a Hispanic-Latino Context

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From the Editor

During the last decade the majority of mainline denominations have embraced the idea and invested a great deal of resources in planting new churches in fast growing communities all across the United States, but while these new churches are becoming the new way of reaching out to "unchurched" individuals, the Latino/a population has experienced tremendous numeric growth and its presence is well noticed in political campaigns, where politicians appeal to this segment of the population; in the national media, where almost everywhere in the U.S. there is a Spanish channel available, and in many major corporations, which have reached out to Hispanics by marketing and advertising their products and businesses in Spanish. In light of these activities and trends, one may ask: What is the Church doing to reach out Latinos and Latinas in the U.S.? What is the Church doing to actively reach out and welcome the millions of Hispanics in the U.S. in their sanctuaries and congregations? In response to these and other questions, the articles in this number of *Apuntes* would offer a critique of common ecclesiological practices as well as traditional understandings of theology, to then offer an alternative from a Hispanic perspective as call to mainline denominations to modify and include the author's suggestions.

The first article offers a general analysis of few mainline denominations and their ministry in the U.S, and is written by The Rev. Dr. Luis C. Bernard, who is an ordained minister with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He has served congregations, both Hispanic and Anglo, in Puerto Rico, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas. He served as Conference Coordinator for Hispanic Ministries in the Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church. At present, Dr. Bernard is the director of the Center for Latino/a Church Studies at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth Texas. Dr. Bernard holds a Master of Science in Counseling Psychology from Texas A&M University Central Texas, a Master of Divinity degree from The Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth Texas. The second article provides a critique and an analysis of one specific denomination, The Reformed Church. And its author is The Rev. Dr. George Cruz-Martinez, who is the Installed Pastor at Lord of the Seas Lutheran Church in Big Pine Key, Florida. Dr. Cruz-Martinez is an ordained rostered leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and has served congregations in New York, New Jersey, and Florida. After receiving his Doctor of Ministry Degree from Drew University in 1990 he began to served as adjunct professor at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey; Saint Leo University in Saint Leo, Florida; Asbury Seminary in Orlando, Florida; and served as Theological Educator in Honduras, Central America while working with the Christian Commission for Development and the Latin American Biblical University in San José, Costa Rica.

I hope that these reflections may be an inspiration for your ministerial and personal life and would assist all of us in reaching out to all our *hermanas* and *hermanos* in the name of God.

Evaluation of Hispanic Growth in Mainline Protestant Denominations

Rev. Dr. Luis C. Bernard

Introduction

The explosive expansion of Hispanic demographics experienced in the United States at the end of the twentieth century led some to forecast the possibility that by 2025 half of all Latinos could be Protestant.¹ The response of mainline Protestant denominations to the increased presence of Hispanics in the United States was to develop national Hispanic strategies.² Hispanic Ministry Programs were developed to conduct Hispanic outreach, organize Hispanic communities of faith, and provide social services to their membership. New Church Development training for Hispanics was implemented and Hispanic new church planters were deployed to the mission field. As a result of these efforts, news throughout mainline Protestant denominations continue to point to gains in Hispanic outreach and an increase in Hispanic new church starts.

Increased levels of Hispanics would signal the emergence of a plural community within the churches. Moreover, the development of a mature and fully integrated Hispanic constituency is critical for the emerging post-modern plural community in America. An integrated multicultural religious institution would enable Hispanics to make additional contributions to the Hispanic community and to participate more fully in American public life.

¹ The methodology and findings utilized in this article are from the author's Doctoral Research Project. Carlos Pozzi, "Race, Ethnicity, and Color among Latinos in the United States", in *This Side of Heaven: Race Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, eds. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (New York: Oxford Press, 2007), 58. Hispanic and Latino/a will be used interchangeably in this paper.

² The term mainline Protestant denomination refers to Protestant churches that historically represented the dominant presence in the United States.

After several decades of outreach to Hispanics, what are the current Hispanic membership levels of these national Hispanic Ministry programs? How much progress has been made in attaining Hispanic proportional representation (diversity)? Has this new context of openness to plurality produced higher levels of incorporation for the Hispanic ministerial leadership within mainline Protestant denominations? In this paper the outputs/outcomes of three Hispanic Ministry Programs from three mainline denominations will be examined.³ The data from the three mainline denominations will be compared and contrasted to each other, and to other Christian denominations, in order to identify the location of Hispanics within the three mainline denominations and the wider Christian ecclesial context in the United States. Hispanic growth in the churches will be measured by a holistic approach that considers, outreach, diversity, and incorporation of Hispanic leadership.⁴ Analysis of the findings and suggestions for future directions for the practice of Hispanic Ministry will be provided.

Background

During the first half of the twentieth century the two major Hispanic groups, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, were concentrated in the Southwest and in the Northeast regions of the country. However, the limited size of the Hispanic population at the time, its confinement to two geographical regions, and the fact that the vast majority of Hispanics were Roman Catholics did not encourage Protestant denominations, or other churches, to develop national strategies to engage the presence of Hispanics.

³ According to the evaluation literature, mature programs measure outputs and outcomes, the results they have produced. See Jody L. Fitzpatrick, James R. Sanders, and Blaine R. Worthen, *Program Evaluation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines*, 3rd edition (Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2004).

⁴ "Workforce Diversity/Inclusion Plan of Action," American Humanics, Accessed December 28, 2009, http://www.humanics.org/site/c.omL2KiN4LvH/b.2157037/k.2110/Workforce_Diversity_and_Inclusion_Committee.htm. See also "The Denver Foundation Inclusiveness Project," The Denver Foundation, Accessed December 30, 2009, www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org.

In 1965 the US Immigration and Naturalization Act removed the national origin quota limitations. This fundamental change in official government policy cleared the way for non-European immigrant groups to have greater access into the country.⁵ This is the initial background for the dramatic Hispanic influx of the following decades.⁶ In later decades globalization added to Hispanic immigration. Table 1 reflects the number of Hispanics in the U.S.A. since 1940.⁷

Table 1. U.S. Hispanic Population Since 1940

Year	Hispanic	Total Population	%Hispanic
1940	1,858,024	131,669,275	1.4
1950	3,918,132	150,697,361	2.6
1960	5,917,665	179,323,175	3.3
1970	9,589,216	203,211,926	4.7
1980	14,608,673	226,545,805	6.4
1990	22,354,059	248,709,873	8.9
2000	35,305,813	281,421,906	12.5
2010	49,775,176	309,162,581	16.1

⁵ David G. Gutierrez, ed., *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3-5.

⁶ Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2,000), introduction, xvi.

⁷ "Historical Census Statistics," US Census Bureau, Accessed December 29, 2009, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>. See also "Hispanic Population in the United States," US Census Bureau, Accessed December 29, 2009, http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/files/Internet_Hispanic_in_US_2006.pdf.

The question facing Christian churches and American democracy was whether they could embrace this new pluralism in the United States.⁸ At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century national strategies for ministry for Hispanics began to emerge. Mainline Protestant churches in the United States who have been leaders in ministries of justice and social transformation took the lead. The United Methodist Church in 1992,⁹ the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 2002,¹⁰ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1992 created national offices and strategies for Hispanic Ministry.¹¹

Limitations/Scope

The aim of the study is to examine a practice of ministry of the church, that is, ministry with Hispanics. To enable such an examination the practitioner/researcher has enlisted the use of the program evaluation paradigm and the output/outcome evaluation method in particular. I do not hold professional expertise or certification in the evaluation research field. These approaches are employed as heuristic tools and strategies to begin to explore the topic of Hispanic Ministry program output/outcome. In addition, the primary intent of this study is not sophisticated statistical data analysis but theological reflection. In other words, the data will be utilized as a point of departure to examine and explore questions about Hispanic representation within mainline Protestant denominations and reflect on the macro implications of these findings.

The study will not conduct an evaluation to determine the effectiveness of any particular Hispanic Ministry program. The study

⁸ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996). "American" in this paper refers to the United States of America.

⁹ "National Plan for Hispanic Ministry," United Methodist Church, Accessed September 21, 2010, <http://gbgm-umc.org/programs/hispanicmin/plan2.html>.

¹⁰ "Strategy For Ministry With The Hispanic-Latino Constituencies in the Presbyterian Church (USA)," Presbyterian Church (USA). Accessed June 12, 2010, <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/hispanic/pdf/strategy.pdf>.

¹¹ "Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries: Recursos," Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Accessed June 12, 2010, <http://obrahispana.org/index.php?nid=113150&s=rs>.

will also not assess the inputs, process, and general outcomes of these programs. In addition, this research project is not about determining the effectiveness of any of the ecclesial systems. Moreover, the project will not look at program participant achievement or other results that the programs produced. The goal of the research study is not to describe, or explain, the process of how Hispanic ministry programs arrived at their present location but to map the present levels of Hispanic representation in each of the three Protestant denominations.

Findings

United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church was formed by the union of several churches in 1968.¹² The UMC operates with an Episcopal polity. In 2007, the total membership was 7,853,955, with 34,660 congregations, and 32,659 ordained elders in full connection.¹³ In 1992, the UMC adopted the National Plan for Hispanic Ministry.¹⁴ The role of the national plan for Hispanic Ministry is to enable the creation of Hispanic faith communities and new church starts. In addition, the national plan provides training, resources, and consulting services to United Methodist conferences involved in Hispanic Ministry.¹⁵ As of 2009, there were 64,857 Hispanic members in the UMC, 357 Hispanic congregations, 660 ministers, of which 366 are ordained Hispanic Elders in full connection.¹⁶

¹² "History: Our Story," United Methodist Church, Accessed June 21, 2010, www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4knN1tH/b.1720691/k.B5CB/History_Our_Story.htm.

¹³ "Statistical Review of the United Methodist Church," United Methodist Church, Accessed July 21, 2010, www.gcfa.org/data_resources.html.

¹⁴ "National Plan for Hispanic Ministry," United Methodist Church, Accessed September 21, 2010, <http://gbgm-umc.org/programs/hispanicmin/plan2.html>.

¹⁵ "National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries," United Methodist Church, Accessed June 21, 2010, <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/plan/hispanic>.

¹⁶ "Lay Membership-Racial/Ethnic/Gender, and Clergy Membership-Racial/Ethnic/Gender," United Methodist Church, Accessed December 12, 2009, http://www.gcfa.org/data_resources.html.

Presbyterian Church, USA

In 1983, the two largest Presbyterian denominations merged to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).¹⁷ The Presbyterian Church (USA) is a mainline Protestant denomination with a Presbyterian or representative form of government. Its present membership is 2,140,165 million in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.¹⁸ It has 10,751 congregations and a total of 13,462 active ministers.¹⁹ In 2002, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted a national strategy for ministry with the Hispanic-Latino Constituencies at the Louisville, Kentucky, General Assembly.²⁰ The role of the national strategy is to provide insight and resources for the local and regional entities involved in Hispanic Ministry. In 2008, Hispanics represented 1.4% of the total membership (2,140,165) of the Presbyterian Church (USA).²¹ This totals to 29,962 Hispanic members in the PC (USA), 21,875 stateside USA, and 8,087 in Puerto Rico.²² In addition, the PC (USA) has 330 Hispanic congregations, 257 stateside USA, and 73 in Puerto Rico.²³ Hispanic ministers represent 2.3% of the total active ministers in the PC USA (13,462).²⁴ This results in a total of 310 Hispanic Presbyterian Ministers, of which 186 are ordained.

¹⁷ "History," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed July 21, 2010, <http://gamc.org/ministries/101/>.

¹⁸ "Research Services: Statistics Report and Articles, and The Top 10 most frequently asked questions about the PC (USA)," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed June 3, 2010, <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/research>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Strategy For Ministry With The Hispanic-Latino Constituencies in the Presbyterian Church (USA)," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed July 21, 2010, <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/hispanic/pdf/strategy.pdf>.

²¹ "The Top 10 most Frequently Asked Questions about the PC (USA)," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed July 21, 2010, <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/research/10faq>.

²² "Comparative Statistics 2008 Table 3," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed July 21, 2010, <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/research/10faq>.

²³ "Hispanic/Latino-a Congregational Support," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed June 3, 2010, <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/hispanic/about/>.

²⁴ "The Top 10 FAQ PC (USA)."

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a mainline Protestant denomination with a congregational polity. At present the CCDC has around 691,160 members with 3,754 congregations and 3,399 total active clergy.²⁵ The Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries was created by the CCDC in 1992.²⁶ The role of the Hispanic Central Pastoral office is to be a resource for the multiple regions of CCDC as they perform ministry with Hispanics. In addition, the National Hispanic Minister is to be an advocate for Hispanic causes. The National Hispanic Minister is elected by the DOC Hispanic membership to serve a six year term. There are about 7,500 Hispanic members within the DOC, with about 155 Hispanic congregations.²⁷ In addition, there are 221 Hispanic ministers, of which 104 are ordained ministers.²⁸

Data Analysis

Several descriptive analyses will be performed to determine if there are significant differences in Hispanic outreach, diversity, and incorporation in the three mainline denominations. The quantifiable measures that are to be examined are the following:

1. Outreach: The total number of Hispanic persons compared to the total number of White/Caucasian persons.

²⁵ "The Disciples Today," Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Accessed June 12, 2010, http://www.disciples.org/AboutTheDisciples/The_DisciplesToday/tabid/68/Default.aspx.

²⁶ "Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries: Recursos," Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Accessed June 12, 2010. <http://obrahispana.org/index.php?nid=113150&s=rs>.

²⁷ "The Four Priorities of the Church," Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Accessed June 12, 2010, <http://www.disciples.org/AboutTheDisciples/TheDisciplesToday/tabid/68/Default.aspx>.

²⁸ Howard E. Bowers, and Watkins, Sharon E., *Year Book and Directory: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Published by The Office of the General Minister and President, 2009), 591-701.

- 2. Diversity: The total percentage of Hispanics persons compared to total percentage of the white/Caucasian group.
- 3. Incorporation: The total number and percentage of Hispanic clergy representation in all three denominations.
- 4. Summary Statistics of Hispanic representation of all three denominations.
- 5. The comparison of mainline Hispanic representation with Hispanic representation of several non-mainline denominations.

Outreach

The total numerical size of the Hispanic membership becomes relevant for the purposes of this study. The number of Hispanics by denomination is shown in Table 2. For presentation, Hispanics are compared as a group to the total membership in each denomination.'

Table 2. Hispanics by Mainline Denomination

Church	Hispanics	Members
UMC	64,857	7,853,955
Presb	29,962	2,140,165
DOC	7,500	691,160
Total	102,319	10,685,280

Observations

What do the numbers in Table 2 mean? A simple observation indicates that the size of Hispanic membership in these denominations is extremely low when you consider that the available pool of Hispanics in the United States number is over 50 million. Interestingly, while the general membership in mainline Protestant denominations has been in a steady downward decline during the past several decades it has

not discouraged outreach to the emerging Hispanic presence. Nevertheless, the overall size and growth of Hispanic membership in mainline Protestant denominations has been modest at best.

Another observation is that the larger the denomination, the greater the number of Hispanic membership. This relationship can be explained by the larger denominations having a more comprehensive national presence and, therefore, more access points for Hispanics. It must be noted that the Presbyterian Church (USA) includes in its Hispanic membership the membership from congregations in Puerto Rico. The UMC and the CCDOC do not include congregations from Puerto Rico in their membership. The explanation for not including the congregations from Puerto Rico in their total membership is that both the UMC and the CCDOC in Puerto Rico are independent and autonomous churches. The Presbyterian churches in Puerto Rico continue to be part of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The membership of the mainline Protestant denominations in Puerto Rico is the following: Presbyterian 73 congregations and 8,087 members,²⁹ United Methodist 100 congregations and 12,000 members,³⁰ Disciples of Christ 105 congregations and 24,000 members.³¹

Finally, the three Protestant denominations do not identify where Hispanics have placed their membership. Do they belong to stand-alone Hispanic congregations? Are they part of Hispanic ministries within Anglo church structures? Are they members of Anglo congregations? Lumping together Hispanic membership hinders the ability to discern where growth or loss in Hispanic membership is actually happening.

²⁹ "Comparative Statistics 2008:Table3."

³⁰ "Quienes Somos," United Methodist Church in Puerto Rico, Accessed July 22, 2010, <http://www.metodistapr.org>.

³¹ "Que de los Discípulos de Cristo en Puerto Rico," Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico, Accessed July 22, 2010, http://discipulospr.org/2010/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=27.

Diversity

Over a period of time outreach efforts to Hispanics are expected to increase the numerical size of their Hispanic membership. Expansion and retention of Hispanics should translate into proportional representation. As of July of 2008, Hispanics represent 15.43% of the general population in the United States of America.³² The percentages of Hispanics by denomination are shown in Table 3. For presentation, Hispanics are compared to total membership and the white/Caucasian group to determine if proportional representation (15.43%) has been achieved.

Table 3. Percentage of Hispanics by Mainline Denominations

Church	Hispanics	Total Members	%Hispanics	%Whites
UMC ³³	64,857	7,853,955	.825%	91.4%
Presb ³⁴	29,962	2,140,165	1.399%	91.4%
DOC ³⁵	7,500	691,160	1.085%	91.4%
Total	102,319	10,685,280	.957%	91.4

Observations

None of the denominations have achieved proportional representation with the general Hispanic population in the USA (15.43%). In fact, all three mainline denominations have an extremely low Hispanic proportional representation: UMC .825%, Presb 1.399%, and

³² "The 2010 Statistical Abstract: USA Statistics in Brief; Population-Race, Hispanic Origin," US Census Bureau, Accessed July 22, 2010. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/brief.html>.

³³ "Lay membership-Racial/Ethnic/Gender (2004-2008)."

³⁴ "Comparative Statistics 2008 Table 14," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed July 22, 2010, <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/research/10faq/>.

³⁵ "The Disciples Today CCDC."

DOC 1.085%. Moreover, Presbyterian research services reports that the percentage of Hispanic membership has basically stayed the same since 1995 while the percentage of ethnic minority membership has gone down since 2006.³⁶ Overall, the Presbyterian Panel found that the racial-ethnic makeup of people in the denomination has changed little in the last three decades.³⁷ Likewise, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) of the UMC found that overall racial minorities have not decreased or increased since the year 2000.³⁸ Instead, the number and percentage of racial minorities increased at some times and decreased at others.

The data presents a complex picture. Gains in Hispanic membership and in Hispanic new church development have been reported. Nevertheless, Hispanic percentages have remained at the same level. It may be that Hispanic gains are being reported, but Hispanic losses are not. The gains could be compensating for Hispanic turnover and losses. The other possible explanation for why Hispanic membership has not increased beyond 1% during this period of time is that homogeneity in mainline denominations, overall 91.4% white, has been maintained by a leveling of minority representation. This homogenous pattern within mainline Protestant denominations runs contrary to the increasing pluralist presence in the United States. A possible implication for Hispanics is that their membership percentage has been around 1% and will remain about the same level for the foreseeable future unless these mainline denominations change the homogenous pattern. Mainline Protestant denominations could be resisting the shift to diversity by remaining homogenous religious organizations. To achieve proportional

³⁶ "Presbyterians Today-Go Figure-Measuring Progress on Diversity," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed July 21, 2010, <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/presbyterians-today-go-figure-measuring-progress-d/>.

³⁷ "Presbyterian Church (USA). The Presbyterian Panel: Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians, 2008," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed July 22, 2010, <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/research/pdfs/fall08panel.pdf>.

³⁸ "Racial Minority representation in the Annual Conferences of the UMC," United Methodist Church, Accessed July 22, 2010, http://www.gbhem.org/atf/cf/%7B0bcef929-bdba-4aa0-968f-d1986a8eef80%7D/PUB_MinorityRepresentationResearch2009.pdf.

representation (15.43%), the mainline Protestant denominations in this study would have to increase Hispanic membership to the following numbers: UMC 1,211,865; Presb 330,227; DOC 106,645.

Incorporation

Access to membership and proportional representation in the church should lead to Hispanic leadership development. The participation of Hispanic ordained clergy in the decision making process of the organized communities of faith is vital to the incorporation process. This study now takes a look at the relationship between pew and pulpit. For presentation, ordained Hispanic clergy are compared to the total clergy in each mainline denomination.

Table 4. Hispanic Clergy by Mainline Denomination

Church	Hispanic Ordained	Total Clergy	% Hispanic Ordained
UMC	366	32,659	1.1%
Presb	186	13,462	1.38%
DOC	104	3,399	3.0%
Total	656	49,520	1.32%

Observations

The size of Hispanic membership and clergy representation in each denomination is very small. This means that when the votes are cast in congregational, regional, or national structures the voice, preferences, and concerns of Hispanics will be lost in the huge sea of the majority. Moreover, regardless of denominational polity, for ordained Hispanic clergy to participate in local, regional, or national denominational positions of leadership Hispanic clergy would have to be nominated, elected, or appointed. However, Hispanics are only 1.32% of the total

ordained clergy, including ordained clergy who do not hold a Master of Divinity degree. The implication is that there is bound to be a shortage of Hispanic leadership in each mainline Protestant denomination. Evidence for such a conclusion is found in the historical void of Regional or Episcopal Hispanic leadership. One consequence of such a gap in denominational leadership is that Hispanic concerns may be perceived as not meriting priority action, when establishing budget priorities. This lack of integration into the denominational decision making processes hinders the incorporation of Hispanics.

Summary Statistics

The data analysis in Table 5 communicates if there are statistically significant differences in the Hispanic representation of the mainline denominations. With three data points of Hispanic representation entered (.825, 1.399, and 1.085) the descriptive statistical analysis for the Hispanic mainline denomination sample includes measures of central tendency and dispersion.

Table 5. Summary Statistics

Central Tendency		Dispersion	
Count	3	Minimum	.825
Sum	3.309	Maximum	1.399
Mean	1.103	Range	.574
Standard Error	.16594	Standard Deviation	.28742
Median	1.085	Variance	.08261

Observations

The continuum of the Hispanic sample is UMC (.825%) Minimum, DOC (1.085%) Median, and PCUSA (1.399%) Maximum. With a range of .574, there is not much distance among the values. The central tendency or mean is 1.103. With no extreme values this mean (1.103) is

close to the median value DOC (1.085%). The percentages of Hispanic representation in all three mainline denominations are very similar to each other. The statistical analysis shows that there is little variance (.08261) or deviation (.28742) from each other. Without much variability, the values are not widely dispersed and remain close to the mean.

Other Denominations

Looking exclusively at mainline Protestant data may limit our ability to discern Hispanic Ministry practices in other contexts and obscure our perception of the wider Hispanic Ministry landscape. Looking beyond the mainline framework will enable comparisons, provide a point of reference to other denominations, help avoid reductionism, and assist in the discovery of best practices. The Hispanic Ministry outputs of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Assemblies of God (AG), and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Hispanic Participation in Non-Mainline Denominations

Church	Hispanics	Worship/Mass	%Hispanics
SBC ³⁹	191,438	6,148,868	3.11%
AG ⁴⁰	293,000	1,662,632	17.62%
RCC ⁴¹	2,579,659	37,232,485	6.92%
Total	3,064,097	45,043,985	6.8%

³⁹ "Annual of the 2009 Southern Baptist Convention," Southern Baptist Convention, Accessed July 23, 2010, <http://sbceec.net/bor/2009/2009SBCAnnual.pdf>. See also "Analysis: What do the Numbers Mean-is the SBC in decline Part 1," Southern Baptist Convention, Accessed July 23, 2010, <http://bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=30656>.

⁴⁰ "Office of Hispanic Relations," Assembly of God, Accessed July 23, 2010, <http://asambleasdedios-conciliogeneral.org/?TargetPage=AE6A661B-6647-4667-899C-7CCCFCB05654C>. See also "2009 Vital Statistics Summary," Assembly of God, Accessed July 23, 2010, <http://ag.org/top/About/statistics/index.cfm>.

⁴¹ "Data on Hispanic Arch/Dioceses," U.S. Catholic Church, Accessed July 23, 2010, http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/parish_survey.pdf#4a.

Observations

Hispanics in these non-mainline denominations worship in religious organizations with the same three types of ecclesial polity found in mainline Protestant denominations. The Southern Baptist Convention has a congregational polity, the Assemblies of God a representational polity, and the Roman Catholic Church an Episcopal polity. In other words, the ecclesial structures for Hispanics in non-mainline churches and Hispanics in mainline Protestant churches are similar.

In 1995, the SBC offered a public apology for its history of bigotry.⁴² By 2005, 3.11% of those attending worship in the SBC were Hispanic. Because information in the SBC is captured by congregational statistics and not individual membership, it is difficult to know the exact ethnic composition of the SBC. However, a growth trend projection from 2005 to 2010 would place the total participating Hispanic presence near 500,000 or at 8% of the participating membership.

The AG has a history of involvement with the poor and minorities. In fact, there are more AG members in Latin America than the USA. Nevertheless, in the United States they have achieved Hispanic proportional representation (17.62) in their membership and at worship.

Hispanics represent 35% of all Catholics in the USA.⁴³ In a church with a total membership of 68,115,001, Hispanics total 23,840,250 in membership.⁴⁴ More impressive is that there have been 40 ordained Latino Bishops, 28 are still active. This represents 9% of all Bishops in the United States.⁴⁵

⁴² "Southern Baptist Diversifying to Survive: Minority Outreach Seen as Key to Crisis," Southern Baptist Convention, Accessed July 23, 2010, <http://www.lifeway.com/article/167986/>.

⁴³ "Statistics on Hispanic/Latino(a) Catholics," U.S. Catholic Church, Accessed July 23, 2010, <http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/demo.shtml>.

⁴⁴ "The Catholic Church in the United States at a Glance," U.S. Catholic Church, Accessed July 23, 2010, <http://www.usccb.org/comm/catholic-church-statistics.shtml>.

⁴⁵ "Statistics on Hispanic/Latino(a) Catholics."

The Hispanic membership trends in the non-mainline denominations are more aligned with the general trend in America towards a more plural society. While the outreach and diversity outputs of these non-mainline denominations indicate progress towards a heterogeneous church environment, we cannot conclude that all have achieved Hispanic clergy or leadership incorporation. However, if we were to map Hispanic ministries on an inclusion continuum matrix, these denominations would be on the more successful end of the spectrum. Their ministry practice with Hispanics proves that ministry with Hispanics works. Statements and declarations that Hispanics simply will not come or join are proven to be baseless by the Hispanic outputs/outcomes accomplished in these denominations.

Conclusion and Theological Reflection for Ministry

The findings suggest that the three mainline Protestant denominations examined in this study have low Hispanic membership, have not reached the expected proportional representation of Hispanics (15.43%), and have not integrated Hispanic clergy leadership into their denominational leadership structures. The collective mean for Hispanic membership of the three mainline denominations is at 1.103%. These mainline denominations remain predominantly homogeneous in the midst of a diverse pluralist society. The disparity in Hispanic proportional representation is further compounded by the realization that Hispanic, and/or ethnic minority, representation may have remained flat, at these same low levels, for a number of years. This may imply a generational perpetuation of the diversity disparity.

The notion of an increasing or growing Hispanic presence within these three mainline Protestant denominations is not confirmed by the findings. Changes are needed in order to reach the expected Hispanic ministry goals. Let us now consider some arguments that can be utilized to explain the disparity between stated intent and the actual results of the practice of Hispanic ministry. There are at least three possibilities.

First, some may argue that progress is slow and that the church, in fact, has come a long ways. This is the “glass is half full” argument. Those that take this position prefer to take a more positive view of events in the church. This study does not deny that some measure of progress has been made. However, if Hispanic proportional representation (15.43%) is taken as a benchmark, then the “glass half full argument” would mean that mainline denominations should be close to 7.715% in Hispanic representation. They are at 1.08% in Hispanic representation. The facts indicate that mainline denominations are far behind and have a ways to go before they can make a case for the “glass half full” argument. Moreover, mainline Protestant denominations themselves report that the level of Hispanic representation has been flat at around 1% for decades.

Second, it could be argued that majority and minority groups in the United States have the right to worship exclusively among their own. In fact, private institutions operating in a secular society do reserve the right to define and grant membership. Without a historical-biblical perspective one could be inclined to agree with such a proposition. However, ecclesial institutions that perceive themselves as Christian churches operate within a theological framework. According to the scriptures the theological criteria for inclusion into the body of Christ is faith in Jesus, not ethnic or racial background (John 20:31; Acts 4:12; Galatians 3:26-27). In addition, scripture also indicates that the unity of the inclusive Christian community is to be maintained (1Corinthians 1:10-13; Ephesians 4:1-6). The church is to be known as one (John 17:20-21). Fragmentation into ethnic subgroups is to be resisted (Galatians 3:28). It should be noted that the vision/mission statements of mainline Protestant denominations affirm the theological criteria for an inclusive community of faith. Hispanic ministry programs signal one such effort to diversify their membership. Other efforts have been designed to attract the various minority groups. These are genuine efforts to reach out to everyone. No one is forced to join and Hispanics and minorities may have multiple reasons for choosing not to join, but all are invited.

Third, a quick answer to solve the disparity between intent and results is to blame Hispanic Ministry programs for bad practice and bad ministry outputs. To be sure, Hispanic programs need to be evaluated and improvements need to be made. However, it would be a mistake to isolate the problem to the Hispanic programs. The church growth trends of the last several decades indicate that mainline denominations continue to be limited in their ability to attract new and diverse members. The religious cultural context under which the Hispanic ministry programs operate cannot be ignored.

Relevance for Future Ministry Practice

The implications for future ministry with Hispanics are significant and profound. From the survey of Hispanic ministry practices in other denominations, successful strategies were identified that could be useful for the future practice of ministry with Hispanics in mainline denominations. First, the ability of the Southern Baptist Convention to attract Hispanics suggests an approach that is getting results. Second, the experience of the Assemblies of God in the United States of achieving and maintaining proportional representation with Hispanics indicates that denominations can attain diversity and continue to grow. Third, the Episcopacy of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States is almost 10% Hispanic, the largest representation of Hispanic clergy leadership in all denominations. In addition, the College of Catholic Bishops has developed a pastoral plan for the inclusion of Hispanic Catholics that is laudable.⁴⁶ The Catholic pastoral plan is comprehensive and has the best emphasis on Hispanic inclusion of any Christian denomination.⁴⁷ These

⁴⁶ "Hispanic Ministry Study," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Accessed December 12, 2009, <http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/studygomez.shtml>. See also "The National Plan for Hispanic Ministry," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Accessed December 17, 2009, www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/plan.shtml. "Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Accessed December 17, 2009, www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/encuentromission.shtml.

⁴⁷ "Study on Best Practices for Diocesan Ministry Among Hispanics/Latinos," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Accessed January 14, 2010, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/hispanicaffairs/BestPractices2.pdf>.

best practices in non-mainline denominations indicate that Hispanics do respond, that Hispanic programs do work, and that progress with Hispanics is being made. The ability to identify best practices with Hispanics in other denominations, and examining their success, would help to get different results in mainline denominations.

Protestant denominations cannot continue to promote ministry practices with Hispanics that are not producing the expected progress. Mainline Protestant denominations need to examine the relationship between their stated goals and ministry outputs in a more critical light. The current challenge is to examine current ministry practice and, if necessary, choose a different future trajectory. There are three possible choices for future practice of ministry with Hispanics. First, the worst ministry practice scenario may be chosen. In the worst ministry practice scenario the church openly continues the homogenous practices of the past. Second, the ineffective ministry practice option may be chosen. The ineffective ministry practice publicly states a position of openness to others but, in effect, maintains the present status quo intact. Third, the best ministry practice alternative may be chosen. The best ministry practice begins to achieve proportional representation and implements integration with Hispanics. Change does not happen at once, but it unfolds as the change process is engaged. Congregations are needed that are willing to assert themselves within their sphere of influence. Engagement at the local level can start to make significant contributions to Hispanic Ministry, Church, and Society. The churches must have in place a more deliberative ministry approach to Hispanics.

The ultimate hope for the church of the twenty first century is the emergence of multiracial congregations. These are theological communities of faith in which ethnic and racial inclusion has been accomplished. Sociologists are studying the phenomenon of the multiracial church.⁴⁸ Recent research has examined religious

⁴⁸ Curtis Paul Deyoung, et al., *United by Faith: The Multicultural Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

organizations that have been able to successfully reach integration.⁴⁹ In addition, the research describes the obstacles and forces that coalesce to destabilize efforts to incorporate.⁵⁰ Multiracial congregations are not common, but the belief exists that, as more emerge and multiply multiracial congregations will have an enormous impact on the transformation of American church and society. The researchers recommend that future practice of ministry be engaged in the development of such multiracial congregations.⁵¹

Program growth and success can be measured by program outputs and outcomes. However, the church is to measure progress and success from a theological framework of doing God's will. There will always be a gap between expectations and the realities of a fallen world. Nevertheless, God expects nothing short of the church doing mercy and justice.

⁴⁹ Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ Brad Christerson, Korie L. Edwards, and Michael O. Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

⁵¹ DeYoung, et al., *United by Faith*, 181-186.

Resumen

La respuesta de las denominaciones protestantes al continuo aumento de la población hispana en los Estados Unidos de América a fin del siglo veinte fue la creación de estrategias nacionales para el desarrollo de Ministerios e Iglesias hispanas. Luego de décadas de ministerio con hispanos, ¿cuál ha sido el resultado de estos esfuerzos? El estudio presentado a continuación examina el número y la proporción de miembros hispanos en tres denominaciones protestantes, Iglesia Metodista Unida, Iglesia Presbiteriana (USA), e Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo). El estudio tiene como propósito evidenciar si ha ocurrido aumento de membresía Hispana en las tres Iglesias. La presencia significativa de hispanos en las Iglesias implicaría el comienzo de la superación del modelo homogéneo y el surgimiento de una Iglesia pluralista. Los hallazgos indican que el número de hispanos en estas denominaciones protestantes no ha aumentado significativamente, pero la presencia hispana en otras denominaciones Cristianas se encuentra en aumento.

Re-visiting Law and Gospel

Rev. Dr. George Cruz-Martinez

Why so little commitment? Why so much individualism? Why so little fruit worthy of the gospel we proclaim? Why so little life?

All of these questions stem from the fact that Lutheranism is at a crossroads in our modern/post-modern world. The reasons for this fact may be multiple, but the reality is that many of our Caucasian congregations have been experiencing a steady decline in their membership and some have even experienced a slow but definite death. This reality should cause us to question our motives in wanting to reach out to non-Whites for growth. Which raises another question: can an organization that is in decline help in the growth of another community or communities that are so different in so many ways than they are themselves?

Although this observation may sound irrelevant to our topic and perhaps more like a statement on evangelism and outreach, it nevertheless hints at what in my estimation has lead to the present state of our Lutheran faith. We could compare what is happening in our Lutheran church with what has been taking place in many non-denominational churches that are being established with great “success”¹ throughout many of our cities and states. Although according

¹ The landscape of American religion, as presented by the Statistics from the Pew Charitable Trust, Gallup Poll, tell us many things about the Church, some of these we would rather go without hearing. What we discover in this and other surveys is that less and less people in the United States of North America have any faith community affiliation. It is no secret that mainline denominations are shrinking at levels that really call into question the future of these church organizations. While it is true that so called “Evangelicals” bring in people in numbers that are unprecedented, these individuals are said to leave in record numbers as well that surpass those of their mainline counterparts. In some circles this is called the revolving door syndrome.

to certain surveys these churches are losing numbers at an even faster rate than mainline churches.

However, I still believe that even though many of our Lutheran Congregations are dying, a relatively "Good Word" is being proclaimed on any given Sunday in these churches. By a "Good Word" I mean to say a word that is theologically sound and biblically informed, unlike many of the new independent churches that do not submit to any creed or confessions that have the character of historical endurance, and if we were living in Luther's age and time, we would call some of these churches heretical communities.

Nevertheless, we wish to judge the present Lutheran ecclesial situation in our country, the questions still stands, why are we dying as a Lutheran Church? It could not possibly be because of our polemical social statements, we were dying before these hit the floor for discussion.

I would like to propose not only a reason for this reality as I see it, but also a new way of thinking and being Lutheran that would perhaps help us to re-envision what being Lutheran really means. What I am proposing is that by re-thinking our Lutheran theology we can accommodate Lutheranism to a more 21st century reality. The church of the XVI century Reformation was born under very specific social religious circumstances that caused her founders to emphasize or over emphasize particular teachings. In this case I believe that the theology on "Law and Gospel" is one of these areas of concentration and over emphases.

We Lutherans pride ourselves in not only saying that we have Luther as our founder and teacher, and this rightly so, but also have him as the one who gave us that wonderful theological standard or foundational teaching such as the one mentioned above, *Law and Gospel*; even though it was the debate between Melancthon and Agricola that brought this teaching to the forefront of Lutheranism.

As a Lutheran pastor myself, who has been faithful to the notion of Law and Gospel, I have now come to the conclusion that this area of theological emphasis needs to be revisited since this teaching has perhaps impacted our religious lives more than any other teaching found in our extensive corpus of doctrines.

I have come to the conclusion that Law and Gospel, as it has been taught and used within Lutheranism, has perhaps been the cause of more spiritual uncertainty than not. I do not say this lightly, recognizing that this 500 years old principle or idea has for many withstood the test of time, and I know that this will be hard for many to digest since we are so committed to our confessions, creeds and theological positions as these have come down to us from the XVI century Reformation. These have, for a long time, been sacred teachings, and I as one who holds to these can appreciate this.

However, perhaps we would do ourselves a world of good to take a new look at how others have come to understand some of these sacred teachings that we hold so dear in our faith system. After all, Luther wrote and lived a XVI century reality that for sure was very different than the reality we as XXI century believers are living today. We no longer think of the Roman Bishop as the Anti-Christ of the XVI century.

During Luther's time there were those who also proposed the possibility of seeing Law and Gospel from a different perspective and spiritual vantage point, and for whatever reason, be these political or theological, they were not well received by the Lutheran mainstream and some were even alienated from the inner circle of friendship with Luther himself.²

² See *Fortress Introduction to The Lutheran Confession* by Gunther Grassmann and Scott Hendrix; Fortress Press. They discuss that situation that took place between Melancthon and John Agricola that ultimately caused the friendship between Agricola and Luther. Timothy J. Wengert's *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over "poenitentia"* is a blow-by-blow account of the debate on this topic, and may differ from the opinion that a rift was created between these men of God.

Times, however, have changed, and since human beings are fallible let us take another look at this sacred Law and Gospel teaching.

Law and Gospel has been interpreted or received as one of "the most attractive message of the early Reformation."³ The reason for this attractiveness was due to the fact that during the late medieval church, as stated by Grassmann and Hendrix, *the law weighed heavily on people*.

Responding to the Roman theologians during the reformation, Melanchthon, who took the lead in defending Law and Gospel, highlights how in God's work, in the process of human salvation, these become the "two chief works of God."⁴ In the work cited the authors' further state that "The principle of law and gospel, therefore, governs the confessional theology of repentance and faith that form the rhythm of Christian life. Lutheranism therefore believes that "Pointing people to the law leads them to repentance and to sorrow for their sin."⁵

It is my conviction and conclusion that neither *Law and Gospel* as presented by traditional Lutheranism, nor John Agricola's position (*Going to the other extreme of over emphasizing grace to the exclusion of doing anything that would hint at having experienced grace*) are full accounts of the wonderful *theological and pastoral* intention behind this theological concept.

Law and Gospel for Agricola are framed by his working with the gospel of Luke and Paul's letter to the Colossians. Even Melanchthon acknowledged Agricola's grasp and understanding of "*poenitentia*" (*repentance/Metanoia*) by means of Agricola's sermon series on Colossians that also became one of the first commentaries of

³ Ibid. p. 55

⁴ Ibid. p. 59

⁵ Ibid. p.59 It is at this point where I would have to challenge the teaching since it is, I believe, grace and not law what brings people to the knowledge of sin and not law.

the time on Colossians and recognized by Melanchthon as “very well written.”⁶

For Agricola, works were seen as “works of necessity” that, as Wengert puts it, “must occur, but they earn nothing.”⁷ Agricola’s sense of grace was so profound (*perhaps due to his conversion experience during a time when the Roman Church ruled with an iron fist of law that was very heavy over the heads of those who wished to serve God through Jesus Christ*) that it left no room for him to see the Law of love that comes with God’s free gift of grace.

When writing on Romans 2:6, as stated in Wengert, Agricola concludes that the person who rest on the meritorious works of what Paul calls the results of God’s righteous judgments “have not yet discovered in your heart how great the treasure and riches of grace are.”⁸ As Wengert would have us understand it, it seems that Agricola tries to avoid, at all cost, even the smallest notion of merit.

On the other hand, Melanchthon’s total disagreement with Agricola can be clearly seen from the outset of his ability to regulate doctrine in “electoral Saxony.”⁹ When Melanchthon begins his discussion on “*poenitentia*” (repentance/metanoia) one can immediately begin to see the split that was opening between Agricola and himself.¹⁰

The mark difference in understanding “*poenitentia*” between these two men can be attested to in that while Agricola sees no need for the Law as a first step in the process of salvation, Melanchthon “leaves no doubt that God’s wrath, revealed in the Law, is a crucial first step in the life of faith.”¹¹ Recognition of sin and dread is what God requires

⁶ Wengert, Timothy J. *Law and Gospel Philip Melanchthon’s Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over “poenitentia”*. p. 32

⁷ Ibid. p 32

⁸ Ibid. p. 33

⁹ Wengert, p. 77

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 77

¹¹ Ibid. p. 78

according to Melanchthon in his exposition on Ps. 51:19. This dread is what brings a person to his or her need for faith, and it is for this reason that Melanchthon can say something like, "Where there is no fear; there can be no faith..."¹²

In light of what we have been discussing I would like to propose the following as a new possibility. I would like to propose a new approach and a new way of reflecting on this topic by stating that the New Testament and its writers understood the teachings of Jesus by taking account of the whole Counsel of God,¹³ and in this way taking into consideration the formulation of what the Gospel of the risen Christ would ultimately become. A statement like this would imply that the letter written by James must then be considered also as part of that whole Counsel of God. This is stated in light of the fact that Luther had a difficult time accepting the letter of James as inspired Word of God.

The concept of "the whole Counsel of God" is taken from Paul's experience in the Acts of the Apostles, 20:27 when he is in written conversation with the Elders in Ephesus. It is believed that Paul is referring to the "whole purpose of God" and this would have included what Paul taught in his epistles (as in Ephesians 1:4-12, Colossians 1:15-23).¹⁴ I find it interesting that the "whole counsel of God" would include Paul's major writing on grace found in his letter to the believers in Ephesus, where he clearly makes his most important contribution to the topic of grace.

To proclaim the "full message of God" perhaps means not to just dwell on our pet topics or theological themes, as we so often do, but to concentrate on the message that in Paul's case perhaps the Judaizers believed he was leaving out, that is to say the Mosaic Law/Judaism. Or perhaps Paul is making reference to the concerns that those in Corinth

¹² As quoted in Wengert from the German text. Page 78.

¹³ The concept of the Whole Counsel of God is taken from Paul's words to the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20:27.

¹⁴ Robert Brow (www.brow.on.ca) JLP Digital Publications, Odessa, Ontario 2002.

had in believing that Paul lacked spiritual insight or experience when writing about the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. What Paul is in fact saying is "*I have left nothing out from declaring to you what I believe makes for salvation.*" Paul believed that he understood what it took to bring humanity back into fellowship with the God of life, the God of creation who has a purpose for the created order.

The misunderstanding of Law and Gospel both by Melanchthon who stands in for Luther and Agricola has rested on the order of the words used to describe this most powerful theological truth. When we read the New Testament, what we really find is Gospel and Law, and perhaps the ordering of the words used by Luther, and even Agricola's understanding of this teaching *may* stems from the fact that the Old Testament comes first in the two parts of what the Judeo-Christian tradition has held as Holy Scriptures, believing that since the Old Testament came first the ordering of the teaching must follow suit.

If we put this ordering of words in our thinking aside and follow the logic of Jesus' teaching, as understood by some today,¹⁵ what we discover is that the Gospel is what makes human beings cognizant of what God has done throughout the entire history of salvation, that culminates in Christ Jesus and the cross. Although the Law is first in the order of Old Testament literature and teaching, it is nevertheless what comes as the result of grace.

God has always dealt with humanity from the perspective of grace. From the very beginning of salvation history grace has been the means by which God has interacted with humanity.

¹⁵ Liberation Theologies from Latin America and other parts of the world have pressed this question. Elsa Tamez, the Mexican Biblical Scholar has done a masterful job in her book *The Amnesty of Grace* where she questions what happens to the victims of the sins I have been justified from. The Pentecostal Church of the 50's, 60's and 70's understood this need for understanding the gift of grace from a grace/law perspective as well. Samuel Cruz, professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York is a foremost expert in this field.

The New Testament writer James understood this to perfection. The Law can only be accomplished after grace *has* by grace been recognized. It takes grace to see grace, and only then can the law be kept. That is, the law of grace, love and justice.

The Law could never bring knowledge of sin to the human heart. The human heart is dead in sin and trespasses. Something that is dead cannot in and of itself come to life. The apostle Paul tells us very clearly that when Christ Jesus reached out to us we were incapable of responding to the call. Only the gift of grace caused us to receive grace. Is this not the message we find in Paul's letter to the Ephesians in the second chapter verses 8-10.

Grace and only grace *must be* the first step in the salvific work of Christ. Grace is what enlightens the human soul to the damage that sin has caused, or as Wengert puts it, "only from the light of the gospel can Christians learn where they have been...where they are...and where they are headed."¹⁶ The gospel is the Word of liberation that sets humanity free from sin, not the Law. John tells us in his first letter that love lies in the fact that we love God, *not* because we understood the law and somehow came to the knowledge of our sin, but because God first love us (1 John 4:19). In other words, God loved us into loving God.

The Law comes in only as a second step to show humanity the impossibility of what could not be accomplished by individuals through the law. The Law that follows as a second step in the Gospel/law proposition is not the Law of Moses or the Law of the Decalogue per se, but the law of grace, the law of love and the law of justice, the fruit of repentance. Show me faith without works, that is to say "fruits worthy of repentance," and I will show you my faith by the law of grace, the law of love and the law of justice as these are lived out in the human/human interactions.

¹⁶ Wengert, p. 36

Notice that the experiences or examples that James uses in his letter are examples that follow the Matthean agenda in Matthew 25:31-46, when the returning Lord enters into dialog with those who have lived according to the gospel/law principle and those who have not. *“When did we see you sick or in jail, and stood by you? And the Leader of the Movement will reply, ‘When you did it to one of these humblest brothers of mine, you did it to me.’” “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you fallen skunks, and into the flaming hell reserved for the Confuser and his crowd. For I was hungry and you shared nothing with me; I was thirsty and you gave me no water; I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me, ragged and you didn’t clothe me, sick and in jail, and you didn’t stand by me.’”*¹⁷

This notion that “I need not do anything for my salvation” is foreign to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The doing of the law of grace, the law of love and the law of justice is not the doing *for* salvation, but the doing that comes as the result of having experienced the Gospel of grace first in one’s life. Paul and the early church understood this concept clearly and it wasn’t until the XVI century reformation that the Reformers began to struggle with this issue. Many or most of the Church Fathers and Mothers understood the Gospel/Law process as stated above, and their writings and actions all speak volumes to this fact.¹⁸

It was the apostle Paul who in writing to the believers at Rome asks them in chapter two, verse four the following questions:

ἡ τοῦ πλούτου τῆς χρηστότητος αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀνοχῆς καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας καταψρονεῖς, ἀγνοῶν ὅτι τὸ χρηστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς μετάνοιάν σε ἄγει;

¹⁷ These verses are taken from Clarence Jordan’s *The Cotton Patch Version of Matthew and John*; 1970.

¹⁸ All one needs to do is read how confrontational these early saints were in terms of the doing of justice, mercy and love. For a good reading on these Owen Chadwick make an excellent case for this point in Chadwick, Owen, ed. *Western Asceticism*, Ichthus, The Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978.

“Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

The Greek word “*Metanoia*” repentance means a total and radical turn around that comes as the result of having a life changing experience with the God of life and God’s love. This is something that comes only as the result of having an encounter with God’s kindness, goodness, love and grace. Could it be possible that the misunderstanding of word order be the cause for such lack of Believer’s commitment to the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a call to act and live in the world as people who are on a journey here, but who do not belong to this world although we are in it?

We, as believers in Christ Jesus in the Lutheran tradition need to revisit this Gospel/Law, Law/Gospel issue again *for the first time* so as to understand the process of faith into which God is calling the Church of the risen Christ today. Only by revisiting this precious idea will the Church be set on fire once again to do the work of ministry, the work of the kingdom. God has not given to the church the spirit of fear, but the Spirit of boldness and power to proclaim grace that brings forth the fruit of righteousness.

Perhaps we need to stop being so “Lutheran” and start being the Church of the risen Christ, as we seek to be disciples of Jesus, God’s only Christ and this from a Lutheran perspective.

Resumen

La Iglesia de la Reforma del siglo XVI nació bajo una realidad socio política, y circunstancias muy específicas, las cuales obligaron a sus fundadores a acentuar ciertas enseñanzas de gran importancia para la misma. La enseñanza o la doctrina/teología sobre la Ley y la Gracia/Evangelio fue una de estas áreas de interés. Después de siglos de énfasis sobre esta doctrina, creo que el tiempo ha llegado para que nosotros como Luteranos hagamos un nuevo análisis de esta enseñanza tan celebrada por nuestra iglesia.

He llegado a la conclusión de que el tema de la Ley y la Gracia, tal y como ha sido enseñada en el luteranismo, ha llegado a ser una de las causas por el decaimiento espiritual y la incertidumbre que nos agobia hoy día como iglesia. No digo esto de forma leve. El debate que se dió durante la época de Lutero más bien se dio entre Melanchthon y Juan Agrícola. Los documentos de primera mano nos dan a entender que estos fueron los que dieron vida a esta doctrina. A la misma vez descubrimos que Lutero mismo simpatizó con las conclusiones de Agrícola más que con las de Melanchthon.

Como señalan Grassmann y Hendrix, esta enseñanza fue y ha sido recibida por la iglesia de Cristo como algo que causo y ha causado mucha controversia, y a la misma vez como una de las doctrinas más atractiva de la Reforma del siglo XVI. Este último punto, por causa de la carga exagerada que la Ley estaba imponiendo sobre el pueblo de Dios durante la Edad Media. El debate que se da es entre la pregunta sobre “qué es lo que se da primero en el proceso de la salvación, la Ley o la Gracia?”

Para Melanchthon la Ley es lo que trae al ser humano a la conciencia del pecado, lo cual da como resultado la gracia de salvación. Para Agrícola, que no simpatiza con este punto de vista, lo inverso sucede. Para él la gracia de Dios es el primer paso en el proceso de salvación. La gracia es lo que trae conciencia de pecado, conciencia de la Ley.

La Ley no es lo que produce vida, lo que produce vida para entender la Ley es la gracia de salvación, algo que nos llega como don divino, regalo de Dios. Podríamos decir que un ser que está muerto en delitos y pecados no puede ver, y menos entender la Ley de Dios. Es por esta razón que la gracia tiene que venir primero en el proceso de la salvación. El arrepentimiento, lo que estos reformadores llaman "poenitentia" no viene como resultado de la Ley, viene siempre como resultado de la gracia de Dios.

Por lo tanto, el imponer sobre un ser humano un proceso de salvación que parte del punto de vista de Melanchthon, es una invitación al fracaso evangelístico. Pues esto sería invitar a un hombre o a una mujer a cumplir con lo imposible. La salvación tiene, por obligación, que ser una invitación al acto de gratitud, pues esta significa reconocer que hemos recibido algo que no merecemos.

La salvación y nuestra fe se muestran solamente por medio del fruto del arrepentimiento, es decir, el fruto de la acción de gracias a Dios. No hay otro testimonio más grande que el testimonio de la acción de gracias. El debate entre Melanchthon y Agrícola tiene material para una larga discusión. No perdamos la oportunidad de entrar en el debate.

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